BOOKS

REVIEWS OF RECENT PUBLICATIONS WITH NEWS AND VIEWS OF AUTHORS

Soundings in the Sea of Ink

Walter's Opinion of His Own Play Victor Hugo. A Newspaper Novel

Work and Criticism.

MAN'S feeling about his own task has a great deal to do with the way he judges others. He knows how many difficulties lie between a plan and its accomplishment. He has at least a rough idea of cause and effect and a human standard of proportion which he can apply to his fellows.

But above all, he has a better balanced mind when some kind of activity concentrates the forces of his nature and draws him out of himself.

The second volume of Mr. Clutton-Brock's literary comment "More Essays on Books" (Dutton), like the first, gives the reader something to think about. And his good counsel extends beyond the library. One of the best of his essays is on "Worldly Wisdom." He analyzes an often translated book of the seventeenth century, Gracian's *Oraculo Manual y Arte de Prudentia.*

Gracian's wisdom is folly, because it is based on admiring observation of the petty tricks of idle courtiers in their struggle to secure honor and advantage, for the most part not worth gaining. Clutton-Brock sets in contrast with Gracian's gospel of intrigue the spirit of the true worker. And what could be more pertinent to a book page than this:

"There is always some honesty, some positive virtue, and usually some charity, in the man who has learned to do a useful job really well. He does know what life is like. . . . Perhaps the greatest virtue of the best modern literature is that it remains conscious of the fact that the mass of men have to earn their living, that it thinks and feels in terms of that fact, and does not judge mankind with the implacable fastidiousness of the idle."

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Laura and Rip.

ASK Eugene Walter what he thinks of "The Easiest Way"—no, confused reader, this isn't the dramatic section. He will repeat, with trimmings, his opinion of his own work as it is quoted in the introduction to the play's text, a feature of "Representative Plays by American Dramatists" (Dutton), edited by Montrose J. Moses. "As it is more or less photographic, I do not think it should be given the credit of inspiration . . . a great work it certainly is not."

That is what the book says. In his own person he adds that he prefers "Fine Feathers." One reason why "The Easiest Way" pleases him less than it does the public is the effect he has seen it produce on a certain type of spectator. "I meant to smash the sentimental view of the woman who sells herself," he told me. "Yet I've watched them sitting there—some of them were Laura's kind, and others would be if they dared, and they blamed it all on the men. You could read their faces or overhear their talk. One woman came alone night after night for weeks and it was plain that she got a good deal of satisfaction out of it—she seemed to feel justified."

Too bad for the playwright's twisted intention, but there's nothing in the copyright laws to prevent people from admiring a character the author tried to make them despise. Moreover, it is doubtful if Laura is admired by any great number. As a matter of fact, being the woman she was, the effort she actually put forth showed more character than one could reasonably look for in her. If the audience—and the reader—feels any sympathy for her it is because the author has made her human.

Mr. Moses's collection opens with the text of Rip Van Winkle, as Joe Jefferson finally played it, with indications of some of the changes made by various hands. It is a long journey from Rip to Laura in the history of the American stage. Yet the same question was raised about the sleepy old drunkard: Was he a person one ought to permit himself to admire? Washington Irving had no very stern purpose to hold up his weakness as a warning.

And now they've put Main Street on the stage. Small town stuff, like Rip Van Winkle, and a similar example of literary popularity forcing a theatrical production. But there the likeness ends. What a chance poor, easy-going old Irving missed! With a woman of Mrs. Van Winkle's courage and initiative, things might have been done to that poor benighted village of Falling Water—especially with Rip out of the way—that would have changed the whole social history of America!

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Creators.

NOBODY ever used long words so lovingly as old Sir Thomas Browne. But he could use short ones on occasion. And he rose to one of the heights of simple human expression when he said: "Nature is the art of God." It is a kind of extension of the same thought to say that art is man's Nature. There he goes on creating in such ways as he can. But feeling his personal limitations of time and place he seeks to draw the riches of the universe into his hands or within the range of his senses—the harmony of all winds and seas in a symphony, the forest and the sky in pillared temple and dome.

Victor Hugo had a grotesque, even a ridiculous aspect. But there was a look of creative divinity in the working of his genius. And when he wrote of Notre Dame he expressed not only the direct meanings of its architecture but the dim relation of man's art to nature and the primitive world. This is beautifully made clear in Madame Duclaux's "Victor Hugo" (Holt):

"The real heroine of *Notre-Dame* is the Cathedral, which Victor Hugo knew inch small, which he had visited perhaps a thousand times in his eight and twenty years, which he loved and, above all, in which he recognized the expression of his own genius. Victor Hugo was of the same race as the mediæval masons who had transposed into stone the immense variety of Nature. Here was an example to show that Beauty can exist outside the limits of Measure, Unity, Order; that there can be a grace and grandeur independent of the laws of classic perfection; a Beauty that draws its elements from the abundance and the complexity of the elements that it associates, in a harmony as elastic as that of the trees in a forest or the leaves on a bough.

"Everything in Gothic art is calculated, but nothing is exact, no angle true, no line straight, and it is this supple and, as it were spontaneous asymmetry, these most imperceptible curves and irregularities, which give their look of growth and life to these immense cathedrals. Whether we see them from without, with the contrast of their vast plain stretches of masonry, their portals full of piled up figures and shadows and their towers soaring high in the air and sprouting into innumerable pinnacles and gargoyles that break the line and soften every contour; or if we go inside and pass from the tower into the cavelike twilight of their vast naves, with their sheaves of pillars, no two alike, and some bright rose window, pure red and pure blue, flowering high in the wall like a glorious blossom of light, a Gothic cathedral has the same living beauty as a natural object, and expresses, not a plan elaborated in the mind of a man but the huge and innumerable beauty of the universe. Which is what Victor Hugo will attempt to express by much the same means.

"And his genius, like the genius of Gothic art, is full of the sense of contrast, half the beauty of a twelfth century church in its opposition of light and shade, its divergence of directions, if I may use such an unwieldy phrase to suggest the force of the buttresses clinging to the earth—clutching the soil—and the push upward of towers and spires and ogives rising, urging aloft; its moral variety also, its assembly of angels and monsters, of doves and wolves, nothing is common or unclean; the cabbage leaf or the carrot may ornament a chancel column no less than the lily or the hawthorn flower; the scold, her hand raised for a blow (as in the Portal of Amiens) neighbors the saint; the unclean beast has his place no less than the Lamb of God. I think Victor Hugo must have discovered his theories in examining a Gothic cathedral. Contrast was the very law of his art. He saw the moral world as we see objects in strong sunshine, each cut out in sharp relief and doubled by the depth of its shadow."

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A Wasted Hero.

TO name a book "Success" (Houghton, Mifflin Company) as Samuel Hopkins Adams's new novel is called, is to tempt failure. Very likely the title is meant satirically. But if the hero failed it is the author's fault, not his. The Banneker defined in the book's opening chapters would never have done the fool things he is made to do when he gets his chance.

Adams has been a reporter and knows about newspapers. He finds a good deal of fault with them in this book. Some of the criticisms are well based. Nobody intelligent enough to edit a city daily would contend that his paper was perfect. Probably thousands of men have dreamed of showing the world how a newspaper ought to be run. A few of them try—in fiction and outside.

It's a great field for constructive suggestion. The astounding thing is that Samuel Hopkins Adams, with all his experience and all his indignation against existing conditions, doesn't make any! He personifies the dream of something better in a young reporter and in an older man who has gone through the mill and kept his ideals. He brings to them a rich newspaper owner who offers to let them try out their theories.

Without any pressure from the proprietor, or other adverse influence of any kind, these two idealists deliberately incorporate the worst features of the papers already popular. They go vicious sensationalism one better. The excuse is that Banneker can thus win attention for his precious editorials. But there is nothing to show that these are really worth the sacrifice of principle. The whole affair is futile and disappointing.

Of course the hero becomes involved in trouble with advertisers, politicians, financial interests and at last even with the paper's owner. Probably Adams intends to make some kind of indictment. But the point is that he never presents a clear issue because his protagonist betrays the cause from the outset.

A few years ago there was a popular musical comedy which held its place for a season by virtue of one singable song. At the end of the first act one woman had been fixed in the mind of the audience as a romantic heroine. The second act was devoted to jeering at her till the first impression was completely spoiled. I don't find any excuse for that even in a musical comedy. In a supposedly serious novel it is unpardonable.

Adams writes forcibly and carries the reader along through more than five hundred pages. There are many kinds of interest in the book. But in the presentation of its main theme, "Success" is a failure.

Creation

Joy, daughter of Time,
Found in her father's treasure
A perfect moment. "Melody, Rhyme,
Color and Curve," she cried, "and Measure—
All you servants of Beauty, come!
Speak now or be forever dumb."
Many voices, rapturous voices,
Blossomed in answer as the rose rejoices
At Summer's call.
Poetry offered a lover's all—
Spilled in a spendthrift line.
Sculpture found a sign
For the rhythm of silence, letting free
The music in motionless marble; through the hall
Of heavenly architecture danced a song.
"How brief! How long!
You make of the moment eternity!"
Cried Joy. Of a sudden she could not see;
Quickened within her the happier years,
And her eyes were filled with tears.

ROBERT J. COLE.

John Dos Passos is young. But since old men started the war and a good many boys died in it their side ought to be heard. And heard it is, through a megaphone, in "Three Soldiers." (Doran). It is a very American novel—though not 100 per cent.!

Dos Passos was born in Chicago and has spent a great deal of his life in England. In his early youth he went to school there, but he took his university work at Harvard. In 1916 he enlisted in the Norton Hodges Volunteer Ambulance Service, which was incorporated with the 25th Division of the French

Army. In November, 1917, he joined the Italian Red Cross and drove an ambulance until the summer of 1918. At this juncture he returned to America and despite a defect in his sight he got into a section of the American Ambulance Corps.

Just now Dos Passos is travelling in Spain

The other two musketeers in this column were poets before they were novelists. Stephen Vincent Benet's "The Beginning of Wisdom" (Holt) was reviewed in last week's HERALD. Dana Burnet's "Lark" (Little, Brown & Co.) will be reviewed next week. It's author first proved his lyric powers in the EVENING SUN. Passos and Benet head and foot this column; Burnet in the centre.

An American Knight of the Air

Young Roosevelt's Letters Present Contrast to "The Three Soldiers"

QUENTIN ROOSEVELT: A Sketch With Letters. Edited by Kermit Roosevelt. Charles Scribner's Sons.

LIKE a breeze from the highlands clearing away the low hanging mists from the marshes comes the story of Quentin Roosevelt to sweep away the sordid impressions of our army life that seep from the pages of "Three Soldiers." Told in the form of letters to his family, supplemented by official documents and other letters, the book of Quentin Roosevelt is the simple story of a brave boy who missed nothing in the way of hard soldier life and who went to his death cheerful and happy in the thought of serving his country.

It is not a book of thrills, and hardly a war book, this series of letters edited by Kermit Roosevelt, and its youthful accounts of routine adventures in camp and barrack might not interest the average soldier. It is rather a book for mothers and fathers, who will delight in the lovable boy Quentin and who will envy Mrs. Roosevelt in the memory of such a son. These older readers will feel the greatest response to Quentin's intense appreciation of the gifts he received from home, to his ardent patriotism, to his love of everything that was fine and honorable, and they will appreciate particularly this further exposition of that wonderfully intimate family life that was the Roosevelts'.

The book of Quentin is one for them to send to their boys in college, that their sons may emulate the characteristics that were his—a love and appreciation of the finer things in life, free from all trace of intellectual or social snobbery, coupled with an intense fairness and bravery. How many boys, we wonder, that is, boys of the inheritance of Quentin Roosevelt, brought up as a son of a great and aristocratic family, subject to all the social influences that surround the position of President of the United States, would write home such a paragraph in his letters:

"I wonder if I ever told you my pet prayer—almost the only one I care for? It was written, I think, by Bishop Potter: 'O Lord, protect us all the day long of our troublous life on earth until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, the fever of life is over and our work is done. Then in Thy mercy grant us a safe lodging place and peace at the last, through Jesus Christ our Lord.' I've always loved it, and now, when life is hard, and all that is dearest to me is far away, it is a comfort to think that some time all this will be past, and that we will have peace."

Not that his letters are spiritual—rather are they boisterous with the keenness of his ambition to be doing the things that counted. He exhibits not the slightest compunction concerning killing a German, and glories in the conquests of his fellows, all of which is, of course, most natural. The touches of serious thinking, however, that show in many letters are characteristically illustrated in the following excerpt relating to his leaving a camp where he had been for some time:

"As we passed the hangar one of the sergeants yelled after us: 'Let us know if you're captured and we'll come after you!' So I left with a big lump in my throat, for it's nice to know that your men have liked you."

The one fear that Quentin had, which he constantly repeats to his family, was that he might become an "embusque"—that is the permanent holder of a non-fighting assignment. His biggest decisions were those necessitated by the desire of his superiors to retain him in important executive positions at the camps rather than let him go to the front where he would be but a junior lieutenant in a squadron without any responsibility. He did, however, get to the front and brought down one German plane before he passed to the Great Commander.

Of his death there are several letters written to his family by friends, some official documents, a number of letters from high officials and some interesting German comments and clippings. These last are remarkable in showing the esteem with which the Roosevelt family was held in Germany despite all that they were doing against her. The German high command made much of Quentin Roosevelt's death, using it as propaganda to hearten both soldiers and their kinsfolk at home. Photographs were made and spread broadcast of the grave, the wrecked plane, and the reviewer has even seen cards reputing to show the body. The effect of this Hunnish propaganda, according to German reports, was exactly the reverse, because of the obvious comparison between Quentin Roosevelt and the several sons of the Kaiser, who had not even been scratched. There is no doubt that many soldiers thought Col. Roosevelt still to be the President of the United States, and the vision of his son fighting to his death while their own autocratic dynasty fought in perfect safety in concrete dugouts miles behind the front did much to break the morale of the German troops.

There can, of course, be great regret and sorrow over Quentin's passing, but no pity. He went forth on the day of his death with an early patrol of American flyers to engage any German planes that were out. They met a similar squadron of the enemy, and in the fight that followed Quentin was shot by a German non-commissioned flyer. It was a case of one or the other, both were soldiers and both knew there could not be the slightest mercy on either side in such a fight. To the German the death or defeat of his antagonist was the means of saving his own life, and he could do naught but try to do so if possible. There is no doubt that Quentin battled bravely without assistance from his comrades, who were heavily engaged, but that the god of battles was not on his side—a fact that leads us into most serious thinking concerning the makeup of our philosophies. His death must have profoundly affected his father and mother, but there can be no uncertainty as to the willingness for such a sacrifice in the name of their country.

Would that all parents of boys who fell in the war had such an inheritance as the letters and documents that have come to Kermit Roosevelt.

Paris Reads Fiction About the Provinces

M. BILLE DANS LA TOURMENTE. By Pierre Villetard. Fasquelle, Paris.

La vanité ne nous manque jamais, même dans l'absence la plus complete de toutes les raisons d'en avoir: voyez les bourgeois d'une petite ville.—STENDHAL.

"M. BILLE DANS LA TOURMENTE," winner of the French Academy's first prize in fiction, is the provinces in wartime, far from the front. Its characters are the men who were too young to fight in 1870, too old in 1914. They "upheld the morale of the rear," formed committees, discussed the plan of operations in cafes, explained bulletins to the bystanders, cried out, "Something must be done!" and on the least excuse they covered themselves with laurels which outshone the humble cross from the front.

It is the war seen through small town eyes upon a horizon limited by the country streets and walls, entering the lives of two small property owners only to furnish new grounds for the old strife which went on ceaselessly between their prejudices and petty vanities.

In the first place, although he had predicted it at the beginning of every season—without conviction—the war really surprised M. Bille. But it soon appeared that he had always foreseen it and that peoples, nations, armies, had meekly followed the way he had marked out for them. A municipal councillor, charged with issuing permits for travel, he terrorized the family grocer who only wanted to deliver a cask in the next village. On such an occasion he would cry out to his fellow officials:

"No more weakness! No more permissions! France before everything!"

But M. Bille's class was called. After the first dismay, he saw in his forced advance toward a glorious destiny the discomforture of his wife and the son-in-law with whom she had been comparing him scornfully.

His adventure was peaceable enough—service at the rear. But he came home loaded with glorious memories of noble suffering. As a matter of fact, like the lion hunting Tartarin and his inglorious quarry, M. Bille had shot a calf!

Madame didn't trouble her head over her husband's record. In his absence she had hoarded provisions, speculated, made money. She was too busy to listen to him. It was only after the war was over, when the soldiers came home, that he could spread himself. He invited the wounded to his house and there, in the little garden, he calmly recounted his share in the war.

"The visitors were silent, they effaced themselves—the real heroes—before a braggart. Neither bitterness, nor pride, nor sarcasm. The tide of talk bore along their forgotten glory. And it was M. Bille whose greatness expanded all the time."

The scourge has passed over the little town without changing it. More than ever, M. Bille imposes upon the public his majestic embonpoint and his authoritative word—the word of an oracle and pontiff, humbly sought. "You, M. Bille, who know everything, tell us."

It is the breath of his life to believe in his own superiority. And the author has neatly contrasted the hero's own opinion of himself with his real stature and his petty interests. He reminds one of his big brothers, the immortal "Monsieur Prud'homme" of Daumier, Homais of Flaubert, Tartarin of Daudet.

Certain malicious individuals who are not extreme admirers of the Academy would naturally discover in the awarding of the prize to this novel a tardy sign of regret for past neglect of books of this type. Possibly honors bestowed on Pierre Villetard point over his head to earlier masters that were not so recognized. However that may be, even though he recalls the creations of Daudet and Flaubert, he is individual enough, in his own fashion.

Villetard is quite free from the malice of those "realists" who only approach nature to punish her for producing the people they hate; who study the plain people only to flay mediocrity. In his first book, "Monsieur et Madame Bille" (Albin Michel: Paris), this author answers the charge of harshness:

"Some will consider the portraits severe; indeed, I do not believe them to be exaggerated." In other words there is no cruel purpose, no systematic pursuit of his characters. As he declares in the preface of the earlier book: "The personages will not turn madly about on one pivot, like monomaniacs." One doesn't get fairly worn out watching them as Flaubert intentionally wearies the reader with the routine of Madame Bovary's countryside. When this bourgeois households atmosphere grows too close Pierre Villetard simply lets in the lovely air of Touraine. He paints a series of pictures with exact little strokes. The light plays over the scene as over the wavelets of a river shining in the sun.

There is only enough discreet irony to define the artist's composition. Such irony he used in referring to his own work, in the preface to the earlier book. "There you have it," he wrote, "this is not a novel!" And perhaps the smiling disclaimer caused the Academy to pass him by at first. For that venerable body scarcely understands irony. How could it see a prize winning novel in "Monsieur et Madame Bille, the history of a family to which nothing happens"? But "M. Bille dans la Tourments" is a war book and women and academies have a weakness for the heroic.

Moreover, studies of provincial life are in favor now. The Goncourt prize given to "Nene," which has been translated for *Munsey's Magazine* under the title "Madeleine," was a good example. That was the work of a country school teacher, Ernest Perochon. One of his colleagues, Louis Pergaud, is winning favor with "The Rustics" (Mercure de France: Paris). Mlle. Isabelle Sandy has just taken a prize with her book, "La Ronde des Faunes" (Delalain: Paris). And a new edition of "Petit Ville (Grasset: Paris), by Claude Anet, is just out.

During the war thousands of city men saw the country, as soldiers. These books bring to them a breath from the fields. The Province, commonly pictured as a figure bent to the ground in farm labor, stood erect in the war, side by side with Paris, which has been too often taken for the whole of France.

And there are many aspects of the Province. "M. Bille" gives a comic view. But the war revealed also the fighting Province, the wounded Province, the heroic Province. There also were the old peasants and the women tilling the soil up to the very trenches, working under shell-fire—Province of "labor unconquerable," as Pierre Hamp called it. We find it a relief to turn to these regions at times from the fetes and follies of the city, by which France is too often judged. But the readers of THE NEW YORK HERALD book section know better.

PANAME.

Golf for Beginners

GOLF FACTS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE. By Francis Ouimet. The Century Company.

THIS is a book of interest more to the would be golfer than to the experienced player. It is designed to point out the hows and wherefores of golf to the aspiring, and in particular to the young, for it is the author's contention that true golf form can be acquired only by those who commence early in life. Thus he himself began as a boy, and many other noted golf players started when yet in their teens.

The book is partly autobiographical, beginning with the author's introduction to golf and proceeding to a description of golf as a sport and an argument to support the statement that golf success and youth are inseparable. There are also chapters on "Tournament Play," on "Watching Master Golfers," on "The Value of Imitation," "Value of Concentration," "Physical Condition," "Golf in Bad Weather," "Imagination in Golf," and kindred topics.